



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

**October 29, 2014 at 4:30 pm
Council Chambers**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Ian Kohen, Chairperson
John Stroh, Vice Chairperson
Trena Carter, Treasurer
Kelly Benjamin, Secretary
Annette Barnes
Richard Gold
Tony McClendon
Gil Palmer
Sameer Samudra

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Rhea Baker-Ipek
Greg Lewis

STAFF PRESENT

Aida Ramirez, Director
Betsy Schuette, Secretary

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

GUEST ATTENDANCE

Tim Shuffett, City Council Liaison
Lorraine Smith, Former Director of the Human Rights Commission

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Commissioner Stroh moved that the September minutes be approved. Commissioner Carter seconded. Motion carried. September minutes were approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Commissioner Carter reported the balance of the Donations Account as \$7,019.24 with no activity since the last reporting period. The MACDA Video Grant had a beginning balance of \$15,000 with no activity since the last reporting period. **Commissioner Palmer moved that the October Treasurer's Report be approved. Commissioner Barnes seconded. Motion carried. October Treasurer's Report was approved.**

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Chairperson Kohen took time to recognize the 21 years of dedicated service that Commissioner Palmer gave to the Human Rights Commission, 20 of those as Chairperson. Chairperson Kohen presented Commissioner Palmer with a framed copy of Commissioner Palmer's Certificate of Appointment that was signed by Commissioners, Staff, and friends of the Commission. Former Director Lorraine Smith also presented Commissioner Palmer with an engraved gavel as a gift of appreciation. Commissioner Palmer expressed his humble gratitude to the Commission and former Director Smith.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Ramirez asked the Commissioners to introduce themselves and give a warm welcome to the newest Commissioner, Sameer Samudra who was attending his first Commission meeting. Welcome, Sameer!

CASEWORK:

Director Ramirez explained briefly the layout of her report and case work for Commissioner Samudra to understand what she is reporting on.

Director Ramirez reported the office is continuing to stay busy with case work. The following is the case activity that occurred:

Phone intake:

- Sex discrimination and safety hazards in employment (not actionable or timely); however, offered resources
- Age discrimination in employment (not actionable at this time); offered resources
- Disability in housing (not actionable at this time)
- CPD complaint (not actionable or timely); offered resources

- Disability and release of protected health information in employment (not actionable); offered resources

Office intake:

- Protected personal information in workplace (not actionable); however, offered technical assist
- Disability, public accommodation regarding ethnic expo; referred to appropriate department
- Disability, public accommodation; referred to ADA Coordinator

Scheduled in-person intake:

- Age discrimination in employment (not actionable); however, technical assist in drafting letter to employer (ongoing)
- National origin in housing alleging wrongful eviction (ongoing)
- Sexual harassment and wrongful termination, filed with ICRC and EEOC (per suggestion of her attorney)
- Safety complaints in employment, offered technical assist to Indiana OSHA

COMMISSION:

Director Ramirez reported that the only Commission item she had was to extend a welcome to Sameer at his first official Commission meeting.

Director Ramirez reported that she did not list it in the Director's Report, but she was asked by Chris Price, Vice President of the United Way Board of Directors, to sit on the Board of Directors. Director Ramirez stated she had moved her tentative yes to a definite yes. She stated that the recommendation needed to go before the Board and be voted on before it would be official. Director Ramirez confirmed with Commissioner Gold if she was correct in the process, and he confirmed she was correct. Commissioner Gold is also a Board member for the United Way.

OFFICE:

Director Ramirez reported being contacted by Pam Weiss, an AmeriCorps member with Heritage Fund, who is spearheading the Engage Columbus Program. The mission of Engage Columbus is to connect community members to information, resources, opportunities, and other community members who will make them feel welcomed and engaged in the Columbus community.

Director Ramirez reported that she assisted in the preparation for and participation in the Indiana Department of Transportation and the Department of Transportation (INDOT) Federal Highway Administration Title VI audit of the City of Columbus. The Title VI audit essentially looked at organizations that receive federal funds to evaluate whether they are in compliance with Title VI. Title VI requires that any organization that receives federal funds, regardless of the activities that receive that funding, to be in compliance with Title VI, meaning nondiscrimination of gender, national origin, race, and ethnicity. The audit evaluated organizations and will later report what they have done well and wrong. The City of Columbus provided a wealth of information to the individuals from Federal Highway, as well as the Indiana INDOT base representatives. The individual who conducted the Title VI audit happens to be the Title VI coordinator for the entire United States. Director Ramirez reported that it was very informative and hopes to hear from them soon as to how the City of Columbus can improve.

Director Ramirez attended the Indiana Consortium on State and Local Human Rights Agencies seminar in Indianapolis. The elected officers viewed a video that featured activist Tim Wise and they began to plan for the next annual meeting. Director Ramirez reported that she was elected as Council member-at-large for 2014-2015 and is honored to serve at that capacity. The Consortium for the State of Indiana is comprised of 23 local agencies that are all human rights, human relations, and civil rights organizations. There are quarterly meetings and private Executive meetings that shape some of the work that happens in those communities. From Lake County to Evansville, individuals gather in Indianapolis to have meetings regarding what's happening in Indiana.

Director Ramirez reported that there was a productive Audit & Review Committee meeting. The public meeting is held quarterly with the last one for 2014 on October 16th. At that meeting, members heard reports on incidents from Chief Rhode within the City of Columbus. CPD had more than 17,000 contacts with the public last quarter, resulting in 2 formally written complaints. Those incidents were investigated on the supervisory level and found to be unsubstantiated. The members decided to organize a subcommittee to conduct a self-audit. The self-audit will take a couple of quarters to process, and if there are any changes warranted, then they will bring it back to the committee who will take it before the Board of Works.

Director Ramirez and Commissioner Palmer attended the IUPUC Diversity Council quarterly meeting on October 20th. Director Ramirez was a guest at that meeting where members discussed issues at IUPUC related to diversity, inclusiveness, and their relation to retention and graduation. Members also discussed MLK Day activities and planning and have also agreed on a speaker. Vice Chancellor and Dean, Dr. Wafa, asked Director Ramirez to be on the IUPUC Diversity Council to which she accepted.

Director Ramirez reported that Deputy Director Connor is not present at the monthly Commission meeting because she had a trip planned to Paris and Brussels. The trip was added into her on-boarding contract to have the time off for the trip.

OTHER ACTIVITIES-NETWORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY/EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY:

CSA New Tech:

Director Ramirez reported that, as a part of her networking, she is bridging a connection with CSA New Tech High School. Director Ramirez, Deputy Director Connor, and Commissioner Samudra visited New Tech last week on October 23rd. Director Ramirez was previously asked by Ms. Oliver and Ms. Hester to come and listen to the kick-off of their History & Civil Rights section. After hearing their college readiness projects, Director Ramirez challenged the students to come up with ways to help the Human Rights Commission with our mission to bring awareness and education to the community. Commissioner Samudra shared his experience listening to their projects.

Director Ramirez also went to CSA New Tech on October 29th to critique senior project proposals. She sat in on 5 project proposals and gave feedback so they can have a good project to end the quarter.

Leadership Bartholomew County:

Director Ramirez reported that the LBC asked her to speak to the November 18th LBC class, which will be held at City Hall in the Meeting Hall. The topic is vague, but will be along the lines of the changing face of Columbus and the diversity of residents in Columbus.

Columbus Noon Rotary:

Director Ramirez reported the Columbus Noontime Rotary requested an HRC presentation. There will be a Commission representative at the MLK in 2015 at the Noontime Rotary.

CITY HALL:

Custom Chucks are available until November 9th at Hoosier Sporting Goods for anyone interested in ordering them.

Stone Belt Art:

Director Ramirez reported that Stone Belt has offered to feature some of its art pieces at City Hall. Director Ramirez attended an event at Stone Belt with Mayor Brown a few months ago and was able to view the art at that time. Representatives from Stone Belt have brought in several pieces of art that are on display in the Mayor's office, as well as a couple of pieces to be displayed in the Human Rights' office. Stone Belt will be bringing by a plaque to hang with the art. The art is for sale with a large portion going to the artist. Director Ramirez suggested the Commissioners go to the Stone

Belt office in the United Way building to see the rest of the art on display. Stone Belt is a nonprofit organization that provides education and support to persons with disabilities.

UPCOMING:

- November 1st: NAACP Freedom Fund Scholarship Banquet will be in the Meeting Hall at City Hall at 6:30pm.
- November 4th: Election Day, City Hall closed.
- November 10th: Professor Fran Quigley's lecture "*How Human Rights can build Haiti and how we can help*". The lecture will be at the First Presbyterian Church in the Laws Room at 7:00 pm. Director Ramirez was asked on a personal level to give some introductory remarks as a previous student of Professor Quigley.
- November 11th: Veteran's Day, City Hall closed.
- November 12th: CAMEO meeting at Chamber of Commerce.
- **November 19th: Next monthly Commission meeting.**

ACTION ITEMS

Chairperson Kohen requested to suspend the rules and change the order of the Agenda to move up the Action Items before the Discussion Items.

Election of Officer, Vice Chairperson:

Ballots were distributed to the Commissioners who casted their votes. A unanimous vote to elect Commissioner Stroh as Vice Chairperson of the Commission was reached.

DISCUSSION

Confidentiality of HRC Cases:

Chairperson Kohen reported that individuals have expressed interest in wanting to know more about the case work done in the office. Chairperson Kohen suggested other ways of being involved with the cases. For instance, Commissioners could volunteer to mediate the cases when the opportunity arises.

Liaison Opportunities:

Chairperson Kohen stated that he would like for all of the Commissioners to be involved as liaisons to other organizations. The following Commissioners are liaisons to organizations: Commissioner Lewis, CAMEO; Commissioner Stroh, Inclusive Community Liaison; Commissioner Barnes, Pride Alliance; and Commissioner Palmer, IUPUC Diversity Cabinet, BCSC Diversity Council, and Audit & Review Committee. Chairperson Kohen stated there are other organizations that are important to the Human Rights Commission. There is an open liaison position with Interfaith Forum. Other possible liaison opportunities include: Hispanic/Latino Community, Indian Community, Chinese Community, and Lincoln Neighborhood Center. Chairperson Palmer suggested the Commissioners bring more options to the table for discussion at the next meeting.

2015 Annual Dinner:

- Chairperson Kohen reorganized the subcommittees as followed:
- Laws Award Committee will be Chairperson Kohen, Commissioner Carter, and possibly Commissioner Lewis.
- Speaker Selection Committee will be Commissioner Stroh, Commissioner Gold, and possibly Commissioner Lewis.
- Annual Dinner Planning Committee will be Commissioner Barnes, Commissioner Benjamin, Commissioner Gold, Commissioner Samudra, Commissioner Palmer, and possibly Commissioner Baker-Ipek.

Creation of History Committee:

Chairperson Kohen tabled this discussion until the next Commission meeting.

LIAISON REPORTS

- Commissioner Lewis-- no report.
- Commissioner Stroh-- no report.
- Commissioner Barnes reported that she attended the previous Pride Alliance meeting. She reported that they were very pleased with the banners that were put up on Washington Street. Commissioner Barnes reported that she felt the onions in *The Republic* about them were minimal. Director Ramirez reported that the office has received calls from citizens inquiring who they should contact to have the banners removed.

ADJOURNMENT:

Commissioner Carter moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Gold. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.